



Administration on Aging (AoA) programs and services assist many African American elders to live independently and enjoy an improved quality of life as well as to provide assistance to their families and caregivers. AoA is committed to increasing and improving service delivery to all minority older adults, including African American elders.

### **Health and Chronic Illnesses**

The leading disease-related causes of death among African Americans include heart disease, cancer, HIV infection, cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes, pneumonia, influenza, and pulmonary diseases. While the Medicare program covers the cost of vaccinations to prevent influenza and pneumonia, only 14 percent of all African Americans ages 65 or older have received annual vaccinations.

AoA is working to end health disparities among older members of racial and ethnic minority populations as part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services initiative, “Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health 2010.” In 2000, AoA awarded a grant to the Boston Public Health Commission to develop culturally sensitive, community-based health promotion and disease prevention programs and to educate older African Americans in the Boston area about the impact and prevention of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The Boston Public Health Commission will:

- Identify culturally appropriate prevention activities;
- Encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyles that acknowledge and integrate appropriate cultural practices and diets; and
- Increase access to medical and health interventions.

### **Life Expectancy**

While demographers estimate that the number of African American elders will increase by 102 percent between 1990 and 2020, African Americans continue to have a lower life expectancy rate than the overall population. According to the National Vital Statistics Reports (Vol. 47, No. 28), African American life expectancy is 70.2 years, compared to an average of 76.5 years for all population groups. The difference in life expectancy is even more striking among African American men, who have a life expectancy of only 66.1 years, compared to the national average of 73.6 years for all men.

### **African Americans and Family Caregiving**

More than 10 percent of the nation’s 22.4 million caregiving households are African American. More than half of African American caregivers find themselves “sandwiched” between caring for an older person and a younger person, and caring for more than one older person. African American caregivers are also more likely to live with the care recipient and spend an average of 20.6 hours per week providing care. In addition, 66 percent of African American caregivers are employed full or part-time.

### **Older African Americans and Poverty**

More than 68 percent of African American elders are poor, marginally poor, or economically vulnerable. African American elders are more than one and a half times as likely as white elders to live below the poverty line. More than one in four African American elders have incomes that fall below the poverty line.

## **Living Arrangements**

Many older African American women are vulnerable to social isolation and economic hardship. Nearly 40 percent of African American women ages 65 and older live alone compared to 19 percent of African American males ages 65 and older. African Americans elders are also less likely to be married compared to white elders. For older African American men, 55 percent are married compared to 75 percent of older white men, and 22 percent of older African American women are married, compared to 42 percent of older white women.

## **AoA Encourages African American Communities to Get Involved**

African American communities are encouraged to take an active role in developing state and local plans that affect African American elders, including those related to the distribution of Older Americans Act funds. Groups that represent African American elders, their families, and their service providers are invited to voice concerns and needs during the public hearing process.

Under Section 297(8) of the Older Americans Act, state agencies must demonstrate effectiveness in reaching older individuals with the greatest economic and social need, paying particular attention to low-income minority individuals. State agencies invite people and organizations that know about the needs and concerns of low-income minority older individuals to participate in public hearings that are part of the process of developing state aging plans.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA is the official Federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to older persons and their caregivers. The AoA works through the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:

U.S. Administration on Aging  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Phone: (202) 619-0724  
Fax: (202) 260-1012  
Email: [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov)  
Web: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

**Eldercare Locator: 1-800-677-1116, Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET**